

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 4

## DISPUTATIONS, CURES AND CALLINGS

### I. Questions about Fasting and the Sabbath (Mark 2:18-3:6)

A. Overall, Jesus presents Himself as able to free people from legalism and illness.

B. Disputes about fasting.

1. The only obligatory fast for an ancient Jew was on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:29. However, fasting was a common sign of repentance or sorrow. E.g., Jonah , Joel 1:13-14; 2 Sam. 31:13. In addition, fasting and other penances were seen as a way of increasing the efficaciousness of prayer. E.g., Daniel 9:13; Esther C:12.

2. Jesus affirms the value of fasting at the right time, but also emphasizes a need for Christian joy and cheerfulness.

- His reference to the bridegroom being taken both foreshadowed His death and seems also to refer to times when a person does not seem as close to Christ. Happiness and sorrow will both be a part of a Christian life.

3. In comparing Himself to a bridegroom, Jesus is picking up on a common analogy of God as the groom and His people as the bride He would bring back to Himself. E.g., Isaiah 54:4-8; Hosea 2:19; Ezekiel 16:7. Jesus is indicating that these prophecies were being fulfilled.

C. Questions about the Sabbath

1. The disciples' actions in walking through another person's field and plucking grain were not unusual. See Duet. 23:25. It was the timing the Pharisees objected to.

2. Neglect of the Sabbath was one of the reasons for the exile of the Chosen People. See Lev. 26:34ff. And the prophets promised that God would protect the people upon return as long as they kept the Sabbath. See Jer. 17:19ff; Isaiah 58:14ff. The Pharisees were thus anxious to protect the Sabbath and had many rules for doing so.

- It was generally accepted that in a life threatening emergency, one could work on the Sabbath. See 1 Macc. 2:39ff.

3. Jesus' response does not object to the overall rules, but says there are more important matters that may override them. He responds to the Pharisees on their own terms.

- Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees was that they had lost sight of the fact that the Sabbath was meant to liberate people for the worship of God. See Gen 2:1-4, Ex 23:12.

4. What surprised the people was Jesus' ability to make an exception on His own initiative, and apparently authorization for the general public to do the same. He is claiming as the Son of Man to have authority over creation of laws, in this case a liberating authority.

#### D. Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand

1. The controversy about the Sabbath is now brought right into the synagogue, and the opposition of the Pharisees and the Herodians is more clear.

- The alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians, i.e., supporters of the Roman appointed king, is very ironic, for they were natural enemies. It indicates a deep hatred of Jesus to the point that the Pharisees were losing sight of their goal of liberating Jewish worship.

2. Jesus presents the issue, not in abstract terms, but in the person of one in need.

- The withered hand likely meant that the man could not work, and thus would be among the least in the society.

3. Mark emphasizes Jesus' emotions of anger and grief. Compare with Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11.

- the refusal to make any response to a person in need seems to be worse than arguing for the rule against non-emergency cures on the Sabbath. Neutrality in the face of need is not an option.

## II. The press of the crowd and call of the Apostles (Mark 3:7-18)

A. Despite the opposition of the Pharisees, Jesus is still popular with the crowds.

- He avoids the obvious path of taking this opportunity to confront the Pharisees head on, instead leaving for the sea.

B. Again, Jesus acts with remarkable power and ease, but keeps the demons from revealing His secret.

C. Call of the Twelve Apostles.

1. The mountain scene may recall Sinai, where the Chosen People were reconstituted. In Mark, the mountains are places of deep encounter with God, as with Jesus in prayer (Mark 6:46) or at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13). Teachings tend to be near the sea.

2. The terms "the twelve" and "apostle" are different titles for the same people.

a. The emphasis of the twelve is on reconstituting the twelve tribes of Israel, nine of whom were mostly lost after the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom. The twelve is just this group, and the successor of Judas Iscariot. There will be no others added after Pentecost, for at that moment the new Israel was established.

b. By contrast, their authority as apostles would be handed onto successors, whom we now call bishops. See 1 Cor. 9:4-6; Romans 16:7.

3. Mark generally does not mention specific names, unless they would be of historic significance. He is indicating that the precise identity of these early apostles is crucial.

## III. Jesus' Family and Opponents (Mark 3:19-35)

A. Jesus' relatives think, or report that others think, that He is out of His mind. Their reaction seems to be more from concern than opposition.

B. The Scribes from Jerusalem are a new group, indicating that opposition to Jesus is growing.

1. They accuse Him of receiving power from Beelzebub (The Lord of the Flies or The Lord of Filth). The name is likely derived from a pagan god whom some Israelite kings worshiped. See 2 Kings 1:2.
2. Jesus' response indicates that Satan can perform many great works, but cannot bring a person to repentance.
3. Jesus indicates that His mission is against the devil himself, and that nothing else will do. The prophets generally opposed particular types of corruption, not the source of all corruption.
4. How to describe the sin against the Holy Spirit has been the source of much commentary. It has sometimes been described as refusing at the deepest level to repent, or to accept the truth that God offers.

C. Jesus' mother and brothers then arrive.

1. It is not clear that this group is the same as the relatives who were mentioned before.

2. In the Jewish form of Greek the term brothers (adelphos in Greek) could mean any close relative. Thus this term was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the evangelists seem to have used) to describe nephews and second cousins. See Gen. 14:16, 29:15; Lev. 10:3.

3. There does not seem to be any ill intention here. But there is a poignancy in their inability to meet Jesus.

4. Jesus indicates that He is creating a new adopted family.

a. Being a brother or sister of Jesus indicates a familiarity with Him. The prophets and priests, by contrast, tended to be more removed from the people.

b. Being a mother of Jesus here seems to indicate bringing Him into the world through deeds inspired by Him.

c. There is no reference to being a father to Jesus, both because this term is reserved for His Father in heaven, and

because one must have the grace of Christ inside of oneself before bringing Him into the world.